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Tuesday, 15 May 2018, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Wronecka	(Poland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Djédjé
	Equatorial Guinea	Ms. Edjang Mangue
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Minute of silence

The President: At the outset of the meeting, I should like to take a moment to remember those killed yesterday in Gaza, as well as all those — Palestinian, Israeli and others — who have died as a result of a conflict that has endured for far too long. I ask all representatives to rise to observe a minute of silence in memory of them.

The members of the Security Council observed a minute of silence.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Israel to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Mladenov is joining us via video tele-conference from Jerusalem.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: For the people of Gaza yesterday was a day of tragedy. There are no other words to describe what actually happened. There is no justification for the killing. There is no excuse. It serves no one. It certainly does not serve the cause of peace. My heart weighs heavy today as I begin by expressing my condolences to the families of those killed yesterday and over the past six weeks of demonstrations in Gaza. Who can possibly find words to console the mother of a child who has been killed? I call on all to join me today in condemning in the strongest possible terms the actions that have led to the loss of many lives in Gaza. Israel has a responsibility to calibrate its use of force and not to use lethal force except as a last resort under the imminent threat of death or serious injury. It must protect its borders, but it must do so proportionally and investigate every incident that has led to a loss of human life. Hamas, which has controlled Gaza for more than a decade, must not use the protests as cover in an attempt to place bombs at the fence and create provocations. Its operatives must not hide among the demonstrators and risk the lives of civilians.

Tens of thousands of people in Gaza have been protesting for more six weeks to date — people who live in abject poverty, who survive in prison-like conditions and who live with no prospect for the day after. Those people want their voices heard. They want a future beyond mere survival. Their leaders have failed them. The promises that they have made to them have not been delivered on, and now the people are angry. But their anger, if not channelled in a constructive manner, will lead to more destruction and suffering. Whatever we may think of their motivation, we have an obligation to hear their plight. They have lived through three devastating conflicts. Their lives are marked by personal anguish, scarred by a national tragedy and marred by daily suffering caused by leaders who use them for their own political ends. For 10 years, they have lived under the control of Hamas, while separated from their families in the West Bank and isolated behind crippling Israeli closures. The cycle of violence in Gaza needs to end, and for if it to end it requires every single one of us to put their best efforts into preventing an explosion that could drag the whole region into another deadly confrontation. The international community must step in and prevent war. We need to move forward quickly and effectively with regard to all the projects that we have discussed for many months to solve the energy, water and health crisis of the population. We can do that only in coordination with Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Egypt, but, before all of that, the senseless violence needs to stop.

Yesterday an estimated 35,000 people participated in demonstrations in Gaza, as did hundreds more in the West Bank cities of Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron, Jericho, Nablus and East Jerusalem — as part of the Great March of Return, as well as in protest of the

relocation of the United States Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Although no fatalities were reported in the West Bank, where limited clashes took place between demonstrators and Israeli security forces at several checkpoints, the situation in Gaza deteriorated throughout the day, particularly along the perimeter fence. According to various reports, at least 60 people were killed throughout yesterday, including six children, and more than 1,300 people were reportedly injured by live ammunition and rubber bullets. One Israeli soldier was wounded and taken to the hospital for treatment. Since the beginning of the protests on 30 March, more than 100 people have been killed, including 13 children, over half of whom were killed yesterday alone. That constituted the bloodiest day in Gaza, with the highest death and injury toll since the 2014 conflict.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad have acknowledged that members of their organizations were among those killed, and the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) claims that at least 24 had links to militant activities. Under the cover of the protests, Hamas and other militants have also engaged in violent and provocative acts, including the placing of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) at the perimeter fence and other attempts to breach it with the intent of perpetrating attacks. According to the United Nations Department of Safety and Security, at least one IED reportedly detonated against an IDF vehicle during an incursion. Eighteen airs trikes and eight shelling incidents were also carried out by the Israeli security forces on 26 Hamas targets in retaliation for what Israel classified as violent acts.

Against that backdrop, hospitals in Gaza report an unfolding crisis involving essential medical supplies. Drugs and equipment are needed to treat those who have been injured. The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, who is currently in Gaza, visited Al-Shifa hospital yesterday, where there is a shortage of beds for the number of wounded arriving from the protests at the fence. He witnessed at first-hand patients being brought in on stretchers and left in the hospital's courtyard, which was being used as a triage area. I appeal to Israel, Egypt and the Palestinian authorities to facilitate the exit of the seriously wounded from Gaza for medical treatment, and I welcome steps reportedly taken by Egypt to that end.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the bravery of the medical staff who continue to put their own lives at risk, such as those working for the Palestine Red Crescent Society, who have endured casualties of their own. I am deeply saddened to note the death of another health worker yesterday during the demonstrations, and reiterate the inviolability of health facilities and medical personnel under international law. Journalists have also been among those injured in yesterday's demonstrations.

The dire humanitarian situation in Gaza, about which I have reported time and again in this Chamber over the past year, has been compounded by the fact that the Palestinian Authority continues to withhold the payment of salaries to some 20,000 civil service employees in Gaza. To further complicate a dismal picture, on 4 and 11 May, demonstrators destroyed most of the facilities on the Gaza side of the Kerem Shalom crossing — the main point of entry for goods and materials into the Gaza Strip. Members of my team conducted an initial assessment of the site, and I can report that the damage is extensive and will hinder deliveries of fuel and much-needed goods to Gaza for weeks to come. As we speak, the United Nations is working with Israel and the Palestinian Authority to bring in life-saving assistance, despite the destruction and extensive damage to the crossing.

Whoever orchestrated that destruction shares in the responsibility for worsening the suffering of the 2 million people in Gaza. The Secretary-General and I have repeatedly called on all to exercise restraint, for all the necessary steps to be taken to avoid escalation and for all incidents to be fully investigated. I have engaged with all sides to that effect. Public statements and messages by Hamas indicate the intention to use mass protests to infiltrate into Israel and attack Israelis. Such statements and action endanger the lives of both Israelis and Palestinians and cannot be justified. I wish to underline yet again that it is imperative that civilians, particularly children, not be targeted by anyone, used as cover for militant activity or be put at risk or endangered in any way.

As the violence continues, technical problems have also resurfaced in the form of a further decrease in electricity supply, leading to approximately 22 hours of blackouts in Gaza. That is a critical reminder of the fragility of Gaza's infrastructure. Starting tomorrow, the United Nations, together with international partners, will need to focus and redouble efforts to implement projects that will have an immediate impact on improving the electricity, water and health situations as a matter of urgency.

The developments in Gaza are an extremely painful reminder of the devastating consequences of the continued absence of peace between Israelis and Palestinians. I would like to reiterate that message, particularly as Palestinians commemorate Nakba Day, or the day of the catastrophe, by which they remember the displacement during the war of 1948-1949, and as they continue to demonstrate in Gaza and the West Bank over the coming days. We must step up our efforts in support of a peaceful resolution to the conflict. We must collectively call on all to refrain from unilateral measures that only steer us away from a peace process, and instead work to end the occupation and advance the goal of a just and sustainable peace, culminating ultimately in two States — Israel and Palestine, of which Gaza is an integral part — living side by side in peace, security and prosperity.

The President: I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to thank you, Madam President, for your swift response to our request to hold this emergency meeting. I would also like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for the important briefing he delivered today on the tragic events that recently took place in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially in the Gaza Strip.

We condemn in the strongest terms the massacre perpetrated by the Israeli occupation authorities yesterday, which led to 52 people killed and thousands injured during the peaceful demonstrations that started on 30 March in commemoration of the right of return, joining the fallen martyrs since the Palestinian tragedy began.

Such repeated Israeli violations are simply a continuation of Israel's violations of international humanitarian law, international law and Security Council resolutions, which would not have persisted if the Security Council had taken a firm stance against them and called on Israel to stop such practices. We therefore express our regret that the Security Council was unable to adopt the draft resolution that Kuwait put forth yesterday, calling for an end to Israel's practices and for a transparent and independent investigation to be conducted into the massacres perpetrated against unarmed Palestinians and to hold those responsible to account.

Given the Council's inability to take any measures to establish an investigative mechanism, we will act in the General Assembly or the Human Rights Council in order to guarantee that those perpetrating such acts are held accountable and do not enjoy impunity. We would also like to submit suggestions to prevent the excessive use of force and ongoing violence by the Israeli occupation authorities. We call for measures that would ensure the provision of international protection to the Palestinian people. In that regard, we highlight the provisions of resolutions 605 (1987) and 904 (1994) — to apply the Fourth Geneva Convention, end what is happening in the occupied Palestinian territories and provide international protection to the unarmed Palestinian people.

The unilateral policies, measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, are a source of concern as it seeks to alter the facts on the ground in the occupied territory, notably the ongoing settlement activities and the expansion of the existing settlements, which is totally illegal and illegitimate and represents a gross violation of international law and Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2334 (2016).

The same is true of the relocation of certain diplomatic missions to Jerusalem, which is a blatant violation of the relevant Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 476 (1980) and 478 (1980), which considered such unilateral actions null and void, with no legal effect. We emphasize that such steps, which constitute violations of international law, will undermine efforts towards peace, exacerbate tensions, flair the rage and threaten to push the region into more violence, chaos and instability.

The State of Kuwait supports the Palestinian call to give impetus to existing international mechanisms, such as the Quartet, by expanding its membership to include other regional parties, provided that it remains under the aegis of the United Nations peace process. We also support all legal and peaceful steps taken by the sisterly State of Palestine at the national and international levels to consolidate its sovereignty with respect to Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the occupied Palestinian territories.

We underscore that, in order to achieve the long-desired peace, we must start by putting an end to the Israeli occupation, whose fifty-first anniversary is coming up in a few days. That should be based on the

resolutions of international legitimacy, the principle of land for peace, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative, adopted by all Arab States at the 2002 Beirut summit. It should also be based on the withdrawal of Israel from all Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories to the June 1967 borders. It should address all final-status issues and thereby eventually lead to the Palestinian people realizing all their political legitimate rights, including their right to self-determination, and the creation of an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Palestinian people appeal to the United Nations, especially the Security Council, to fulfil all of the pledges made towards the maintenance of international peace and security. In that regard, we reaffirm our unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian people in the defence of their just cause and legitimate rights, including their historical and principled rights to Al-Quds Al-Sharif, guaranteed by the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy. We call on States to recognize the State of Palestine, with occupied East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): Today's meeting was called to discuss the issue of violence in the Middle East. We are all concerned about violence in the Middle East. The United States deplores the loss of human life. But there is a lot of violence throughout the region, and I will note that the double standard is all too common in the Chamber — and working overtime today.

Last week, Iranian forces attacked Israeli positions in the Golan Heights by launching rockets from Syria. That was a reckless provocation and an escalation that must be stopped. It is an example of regional violence that should occupy our attention here in the Security Council. Also last week, Iranian proxy forces in Yemen launched missiles into Saudi Arabia. It was not the first time they have done that. That too is regional violence that should occupy our attention here in the Security Council.

In recent days, Hamas terrorists, backed by Iran, have incited attacks against Israeli security forces and infrastructure. That is violence that should occupy our attention too. The common thread in all of that is the destabilizing conduct of the Iranian regime — a regime that insists on promoting violence throughout the Middle East, while depriving its own people of basic human rights.

The United States welcomes a discussion on that violence in the Middle East. We welcome discussing the ways we can cooperate with each other to put an end to that violence. There is far too little discussion in the Security Council on Iran's destabilizing presence in Syria, its promotion of violence in Yemen, its support for terrorism in Gaza and its dangerous and illegal weapons build-up in Lebanon.

However, in the minds of some, today's meeting was not called to discuss any of those examples of violence in the Middle East. Today's meeting was called to discuss the violence that some suggest was connected with yesterday's opening of the United States Embassy in Jerusalem. For some people, the Embassy opening is said to be a reason to engage in violence. How is that justified? As our President said when he announced the decision in December, the location of our Embassy has no bearing on the specific boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem or the resolution of contested borders. It has no bearing on Jerusalem's holy sites. It does not prejudge whatever the parties might negotiate in a peace agreement. It does not undermine the prospects for peace in any way. And yet for some this is supposedly a cause for violence.

But let us remember that the Hamas terrorist organization has been inciting violence for years, long before the United States decided to move its Embassy. In recent days multiple news organizations have documented the Hamas incitement in Gaza. They have reported that Hamas maps and social media show the fastest routes to reach Israeli communities in case demonstrators make it through the security fence. They have reported on Hamas messages broadcast over loudspeakers, urging demonstrators to burst through the fence and falsely claiming that Israeli soldiers were fleeing when in fact they were not. The same loudspeakers are used by Hamas to urge crowds to "get closer, get closer to the security fence".

Hamas has attacked the Kerem Shalom crossing, the biggest entry point in Gaza for fuel, food and medical supplies. That is how determined they are to make the lives of the Palestinian people miserable. They light Molotov cocktails attached to kites and attempt to fly them into Israel to cause as much destruction as possible. When asked yesterday why he put a swastika on his burning kite, the terrorist responded, "the Jews go crazy when you mention Hitler". That is what is endangering the people of Gaza. Make no mistake: Hamas is pleased with the results from yesterday.

I ask my colleagues here in the Security Council, who among us would accept this type of activity on their border? No one would. No country in the Chamber would act with more restraint than Israel has. In fact, the records of several countries here today suggest they would be much less restrained. Those who suggest that the Gaza violence has anything to do with the location of the American Embassy are sorely mistaken. Rather, the violence comes from those who reject the existence of the State of Israel in any location. Such a motivation, the destruction of a United Nations Member State, is so illegitimate as to not be worth our time in the Security Council other than the time it takes to denounce it.

Yesterday's opening of the American Embassy in Jerusalem is a cause for celebration for the American people. Moving the United States Embassy to Jerusalem was the right thing to do. It reflects the will of the American people. It reflects our sovereign right to decide the location of our Embassy, a right that everyone in the Chamber claims for their own country. Importantly, moving our Embassy to Jerusalem also reflects the reality that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. It has served as Israel's capital since the founding of the State. It is the ancient capital of the Jewish people. There is no plausible peace agreement under which Jerusalem would no longer remain the capital of Israel. Recognizing this reality makes peace more achievable, not less. The United States is prepared to support peace negotiations and a peace agreement in every way. We want nothing more than peace, a peace in which peoples of all faiths are free to worship in Jerusalem, and a peace in which the rights of all people are respected and the future prospects of all people are bright. That peace will only be achieved if it is rooted in the realities that too many choose to deny. The United States action yesterday promoted the reality and the desire for peace. It is our sincere wish that the nations of the world will join us in this pursuit of credible, realistic and enduring peace.

In conclusion, I want to take a moment to mark the seventieth anniversary of Israel's independence. Here in the Security Council, on behalf of the American people, I congratulate our friends in Israel on the remarkable achievement of 70 years of independence. From humble and desperate beginnings, a proud people have realized the prophet Isaiah's vision of a light unto the nations. May the next 70 years be ones of strength, of hope and of peace.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his sobering briefing. I would like to thank him and his staff for everything they are doing to try to calm down the violence. I also echo his tribute to the medical staff on the ground, as well as his appeal for facilitatiting the evacuation of the wounded.

We have seen a concatenation of loss of life, casualties and volume of light fire in Gaza yesterday, and this has been shocking and appalling to most of us. It is a depressingly familiar pattern that we have seen over recent weeks, and it includes the deaths of the children. At a highly sensitive time in the region, we call for calm and restraint. The further escalation of violence serves no one's interests. It is only destructive to peace efforts and to wider regional security.

We understand that 60 people were killed yesterday in Gaza, six of whom were children. Around 2,771 people were reported injured, and that included over 1,300 injured by live ammunition. The death toll on Monday means that 90 Palestinians have been killed in the past six weeks for approaching the fence that has been placed around Gaza. There is an urgent need to establish the facts around yesterday's events, including why such a volume of live fire continues to be deemed justified. The Palestinian right to peaceful protest is undeniable. At the same time, we are deeply concerned that peaceful protests in Gaza have been exploited by extremist elements. For example, we have seen troops belonging to the Israeli Defence Forces targeted by improvised explosive devices, and we have seen the use of Molotov cocktails. That is not acceptable.

Palestinians have a right to peaceful protest, and Israel has an undeniable right to protect its borders from Hamas and other terrorist groups and threats. The United Kingdom remains strongly supportive of Israel's right to defend itself. We recognize today is a sensitive anniversary for the Palestinians. We implore Israel to act with restraint in accordance with international law and, more than anything, to ensure that its security forces do not resort to the use of excessive force.

The volume of live fire used in Gaza yesterday and the consequent number of deaths is destressing and cannot be ignored by the Council. I want to reiterate the United Kingdom's support for independent and transparent investigations into the events that have taken place in recent weeks, including the extent to which the rules of engagement of the Israeli security forces are in line with international law. The death

toll alone warrants such a comprehensive inquiry. We continue to urge that the findings of the investigations be made public and, if wrongdoing is found, that those responsible be held to account.

Our position on the status of Jerusalem and the move of the American Embassy is well known. Our position is clear and long-standing. It is that the status of Jerusalem should be determined in a negotiated settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and that Jerusalem should ultimately be the shared capital of the Israeli and Palestinian States. We need to look forward, and we need to work urgently towards a resolution of the long-standing issues between Israel and the Palestinian people. Like the Council, the United Kingdom is committed to a two-State solution, with Jerusalem as a shared capital, and to achieving peace and stability in the wider region. We see negotiations towards a two-State solution as the best way to end the occupation and to meet the national aspirations of the Jewish and the Palestinian peoples. But, now more than ever, we need a political process that delivers a two-State solution. We agree with the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General that the situation in Gaza is desperate and deteriorating and that the international community must step up its efforts. To that end, I would like to conclude by requesting that the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and his Office bring forward proposals to address the situation in Gaza. They should include easing restrictions on access and movement and international support for urgent infrastructure and economic development projects. We also reiterate our support for the Egyptian-led reconciliation process and the return of the Palestinian Authority to the full administration of the Gaza Strip.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to thank you, Madam President, for convening today's meeting, and the delegation of Kuwait for requesting it.

Eight-month-old Laila Anwar Al-Ghandour, 14-year-old Ezz Eldin Alsamaak, 15-year-old Wisaal Fadl Ezzat Alsheikh Khalil, 16-year-old Ahmed Adel Musa Alshaer, 16-year-old Saeed Mohamed Abu Alkheir, 18-year-old Ibrahim Ahmed Alzarqa, 19-year-old Eman Ali Sadiq Alsheikh, 19-year-old Zayid Mohamed Hassan Omar, 20-year-old Motassem Fawzy Abu Louley and 21-year-old Anas Hamdan Salim Qadee were the first 10 people murdered by the security forces of the occupying Power yesterday in Gaza. Today we observed a minute of silence in memory of the victims. However, I also believe that minute of silence served to remind us that the Security Council is ineffective.

The Security Council — not only now or in recent years, but over the past decades — has failed the Palestinian people. Therefore, as a member of the Security Council, and through my brother, the observer of Palestine, who is here with us today, I would like to apologize to the 6 million Palestinian refugees who have lost their homes and now live in camps far from the land on which they were born. I apologize for the promise to establish a Palestinian State that has not been kept for more than 70 years. I apologize for the more than 50 years of occupation and for the ongoing construction of Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian territory. The international community has failed them. I apologize for the 10-year inhumane blockade in Gaza and for the construction of a shameful wall along the West Bank. The international community has failed them.

I apologize for the Israeli checkpoints, through which they must pass daily on their way to work. The international community has failed them. I would like to apologize to the more than 97 Palestinians, 12 of whom were children, who lost their lives in the past six weeks since the Great March of Return began. The international community — the Security Council — has failed them. I would like to apologize to the more than 12,000 Palestinians — men, women, the elderly and children — who have been injured as a result of the Israeli aggression. More than 3,500 of them have suffered injuries of varying intensity caused by live ammunition that will leave them permanently maimed. The international community has failed them. I apologize to the more than 300 Palestinian boys and girls detained in Israeli prisons or detention centres. Some are tried in military tribunals, others are simply held in administrative detention. The international community — the Security Council — has failed them.

I would like to apologize to the 169 health workers who were injured while providing emergency assistance to Palestinians along the barrier that separates Israel and Gaza. The international community has also failed them. I apologize for the 18 ambulances that were damaged in recent weeks and for the hospitals and health centres in Gaza that have collapsed because of inadequate supplies of gas, water and electricity. I would like to apologize for the four hours of electricity

provided to them every day. The international community has failed them.

I believe it is necessary to clarify that although there are two parties to this ill-named conflict — because it is not a conflict; we are dealing with an illegal occupation, an occupying Power and an occupied territory — they are not on equal footing. Israel is the occupying Power and Palestine is under occupation. A historic and blatant inequality exists. One party continues to use force to occupy the territory of the other. One party forcibly displaces civilians, confiscates land, demolishes homes and continues to move settlers into illegally built settlements. One party has imposed a blockade on Gaza, which has led to dreadful humanitarian consequences. As Mr. Mladenov so eloquently stated, Gaza has become a sort of prison.

In addition, the unilateral decision taken by the Government of the United States of America to set up its Embassy in the occupied city of Jerusalem only heightens tensions. Bolivia reiterates its firmest condemnation of that decision, as it violates Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. The United States, as a supporter of the occupying Power, has become an obstacle to peace. It is part of the problem, not of the solution.

After witnessing recent events, Bolivia believes that the relevant International Criminal Court mechanisms should be employed to conduct an investigation and determine those responsible for the crimes committed during the Great March of Return so that they can be held accountable. Given the current landscape, we firmly commit to taking part in all international efforts to bring about a peaceable solution to the situation. In that regard, we support initiatives such as the Quartet road map, the Madrid Principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, among others, that would ensure fair and lasting peace and enable the two sides to live in safe, recognized borders. We reiterate our belief that the only long-term solution is the two-State solution, in which at last a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State is established within pre-1967 international borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

In conclusion, we have heard much talk about Iran, Iran, Iran. We have heard much talk about Hamas, Hamas, Hamas. But we have heard nothing about the real reason for the current situation, which is the occupation, the occupation, the occupation. When the occupation ends, we can discuss whether or not there is compliance with Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. Bolivia will never justify terrorism. At the same time, we will not fall into the trap of claiming that the problem lies with Hamas when the underlying issue is that a State recognized by the Organization is illegally occupying the territory of another and subjecting a people to sub-human conditions. This is a systematic violation of the Charter of the United Nations. Only when the occupation comes to an end will we be able to say that we have done our duty.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his very sobering briefing this morning. As we held an open debate on this issue some two weeks ago (see S/PV.8244), I will focus my remarks today on the immediate situation in Gaza.

We are appalled by the violence that we have witnessed in Gaza since 30 March, in particular the sharp escalation yesterday. Every life lost is a tragedy, but the number of people killed was the highest in a single day since the beginning of the protests. Indeed, it was the bloodiest day since the last conflict in Gaza, in 2014.

Yesterday at least 60 Palestinians were killed by the Israeli security forces and more than 2,000 were wounded. Yet again the Israeli security forces used live ammunition, including when shooting at children. There are reports that several children under the age of 18 were among those killed yesterday, in addition to the seven children killed in the preceding weeks. We condemn the killings, and we express our condolences in connection with the tragic loss of life.

As we have stated repeatedly, Israel has a right to protect itself and the people within its borders. That said, Israel, as the occupying Power, has a responsibility to protect Palestinian civilians and must fully respect the right to peaceful protest; protect civilians; and ensure that the use of force and other measures taken are strictly proportional. The lethal use of force should be exercised with maximum restraint, and only as a last resort. These incidents raise serious concerns as to their compatibility with international law, and there must be an independent and transparent investigation, as called for by the Secretary-General, among many others.

We urge all parties to act with the utmost restraint to avoid any further loss of life and to protect civilians, particularly children. This means never making children the target of violence as well as not putting children

in harm's way or encouraging them to participate in violence. We urge the Israeli security forces to refrain from the use of force against unarmed civilian protesters and representatives of the media. We also call on Hamas and those organizing the demonstrations to avoid any provocations and ensure that protests remain non-violent and peaceful.

In addition, we must not forget that the people of Gaza have lived in intolerable conditions for far too long, in a humanitarian situation that is now deteriorating even further. To tackle this situation and to enable Gaza to recover, movement and access restrictions must be eased. We support the proposal just made by the representative of the United Kingdom on the need to come forward with concrete ideas in this regard.

At this time, Israelis and Palestinians are commemorating defining moments in their history that serve as important reference points for both peoples. The position of Sweden and of the whole European Union on the status of Jerusalem as a final-status issue is clear and will not change. All three Abrahamic religions — Judaism, Islam and Christianity — have strong bonds to Jerusalem that must be preserved. A way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both States, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions. In line with the long-standing policy of the European Union, we will continue to respect the international consensus on the status of Jerusalem embodied in, inter alia, Security Council resolution 478 (1980), including on the location of diplomatic representation, until the final status of Jerusalem is resolved.

As was stated in December last year, we regret the United States' decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This runs counter to international law and the Council's resolutions.

Our immediate priority must now be to defuse the current tensions on the ground, as more demonstrations are expected today and in the coming days. The lethal violence cannot be allowed to continue. All parties must take immediate steps to de-escalate, and the Council has a responsibility to actively promote such efforts. We regret that the press statement proposed by Kuwait yesterday could not be adopted, and we hope that a way forward on an appropriate public expression can be found without further delay. There is unanimity around this table, I believe, in calls for restraint and de-escalation to break the cycle of violence, relieving the dire situation in Gaza, and for resumed serious negotiations towards peace.

Increased regional instability must not contribute to a marginalization of the Israeli-Palestinian question. We must more than ever urgently engage to bring the parties back to negotiations so as to advance the two-State solution. Intra-Palestinian reconciliation and the Palestinian Authority's re-establishment in Gaza are also needed. A halt to settlements and an end to the ongoing Israeli occupation are fundamental. It is time for a relaunch of the Middle East peace process.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to thank you, Madam President, for having convened this emergency meeting, and Mr. Mladenov for his comprehensive and concerning briefing.

Peru is appalled at the situation in Gaza, where at least 60 Palestinians died only yesterday, in addition to the dozens of people killed and thousands of others wounded in recent days and weeks. We note with particular sorrow that many of the victims were minors. These unacceptable actions run counter to minimum standards of coexistence, international law, international humanitarian law and human rights, and they increase instability in the Middle East.

Peru believes that the acts of violence that took place yesterday and in recent weeks, because of their scope and repercussions in terms of human lives, should be the subject of an exhaustive, transparent and independent investigation that will make it possible to assign responsibility. It will be necessary to specifically determine the degree of compliance by the Israeli authorities and troops with the principles of proportionality, precaution and legality, given that they maintain that they are acting in legitimate self-defence. It will also have to be determined if the Palestinians committed acts of violence and incitement beyond the exercise of their rights and the freedoms of association and expression, putting the lives of children and young people at risk.

We agree with Secretary-General António Guterres on the need for Israel to calibrate the use of force and minimize the use of live ammunition. Lethal force should be used only as a last resort, under the imminent threat of death or severe injury. Likewise, also in line with what was stated by the Secretary-General, we believe that Hamas and the leaders of the Gaza demonstrations should keep the demonstrators away from the Israeli

fence and refrain from all violent actions, provocations and attempts to breach the fence. We stress once again that in the context of any assessment of the violence in Gaza, due attention must be paid to its root causes, particularly the tragic humanitarian situation of its population. Failing that, the consistent scarcity of goods and basic services, as well as the shutting in of millions of Palestinians, will continue to create an ideal scenario for those who promote violence and extremism.

Peru believes that the deplorable events that bring us together are yet further proof of the deep and progressive deterioration of the political and humanitarian conditions underlying the Palestinian question as well as the lack of prospects for a definitive solution. We note with concern that in this fragile environment, unilateral decisions and actions taken with respect to the city of Jerusalem could lead to an even greater escalation of violence. We should recall that the final status of Jerusalem must be negotiated directly between the parties.

We call once again on political, religious and social authorities and leaders, on both the Palestinian and Israeli sides, to act with moderation and promote the resumption of a high-level dialogue that will enable their respective peoples and the Middle East as a whole to move towards a sustainable peace. We reiterate our call on the parties to resume direct negotiations, with a view to reaching a definitive solution to the conflict on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, with two States living in peace, side by side, within mutually and internationally recognized borders.

In conclusion, it is urgent that the Council act with unity on this issue, not only with respect to the resolutions adopted and the responsibility for international peace and security assigned to it by the Charter, but also because of the moral obligation to defend life above all else.

Ms. Edjang Mangue (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, my delegation would like to thank Kuwait for calling this emergency meeting on the Middle East, specifically due to the gravity of recent events on the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip. We also thank you, Madam President, for the swift convocation of the Council. We also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his succinct, clear, exhaustive and very alarming presentation.

We all witnessed yesterday's bloody events in the Gaza Strip, shared by media the world over. Estimates put the number of lives lost at more than 50, including those of children, and the number of injured Palestinians at more than 2,500, 1,300 of them shot by Israeli Defence Forces troops. Taken together with the death and damage wrought since the Great March of Return began, in late March, jeopardizes hopes for peace, security and stability in Gaza. My delegation regrets this situation and these deaths, and we urge the international community to remedy the situation.

As we said in the previous emergency meeting (see S/PV.8219), on 30 March, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea calls on the parties to refrain from any act that could lead to violence. Acts of violence must cease immediately and definitively, and both parties must comply with international law as set out in the various resolutions of the United Nations.

These incidents not only increase existing tensions on the Palestinian question, but also exacerbate the long-standing socioeconomic and humanitarian instability beseting the population of Gaza. This is clear from the request for emergency medical aid from neighbouring Egypt and the possible transfer of the wounded.

Equatorial Guinea views the historic claims of the Palestinians to be just, in accordance with the numerous statements of the African Union on the matter. We also believe that Israel has the right to live in peace and security. Israel must recognize that, just as its right to exist cannot be denied, neither can that of Palestine. Only in this way can two independent States coexist with Jerusalem as their shared capital. Both of the parties must therefore comply with international law as expressed in the various relevant resolutions.

In addressing the Palestinian question, we cannot ignore the important role of countries with political influence in the Middle East, which can, and should, play a prominent mediating role between the belligerents, promoting, among other things, the implementation of resolutions emanating from the Organization in which we have all invested our trust with regard to preventing and resolving the world's conflicts.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I should like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his detailed and informative briefing and his dispassionate approach to a particularly troubling situation, the developments about which he has consistently alerted us.

Yesterday and today mark the culmination of a month and a half of violence and repression by the Israeli forces against Palestinian protesters in Gaza. The repeated warnings to the Council, including by France, since late March have gone unheeded. The situation on the ground continued its relentless escalation, yesterday reaching the shocking total of more than 60 demonstrators killed in a single day, which brings the number of Palestinian demonstrators killed by the Israeli forces over the past month and a half to nearly 100. These tragic numbers speak for themselves.

First, the ongoing situation in Gaza is a tragic new illustration of the human consequences of the stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a result of a total absence of political hope. We have been saying this for years: the prevailing situation in Gaza is not sustainable. The ongoing violence is itself rooted in a decade of Israeli blockades, aggravated by the stalemate in the process of reconciliation and its humanitarian consequences. The Hamas-backed protests of recent weeks are fuelled by this situation, together with the absence of any prospects for hope in the peace process with Israel or on inter-Palestinian reconciliation; the absence of any prospects for economic improvement, due to the land, air and sea blockade maintaining one of the highest unemployment rates in the world, at around 40 per cent, and per capita income lower than 25 years ago; and a very youthful population, more than half of them aged under 18, for whom, in this context, hope for peace has given way to the feeling of having nothing to lose.

The unfolding tragedy cannot be separated from the desperation of the people of Gaza. That is why, beyond de-escalation — which is an immediate imperative — and beyond meeting emergency humanitarian needs, it is essential to work towards sustainable solutions for Gaza in the broader context of the two-State solution. This is why we urge Mr. Mladenov to engage in-depth in that regard in the Gaza Strip.

Secondly, the record of repression of the weekly demonstrations, which have been taking place since 30 March, is shocking. A new line was crossed yesterday, which risks heralding a point of no return and triggering a cycle of uncontrollable violence. Since 30 March, 99 Palestinians, including 12 minors, have been killed while demonstrating along the separation line in Gaza. This very heavy toll is directly related to the inadequate and disproportionate response of the Israeli security forces. Yesterday President Macron clearly condemned the violence of the Israeli armed forces. These serious incidents must be fully explained, and we recall in that regard the request of the Secretary-General for an independent and transparent inquiry.

In the immediate term, two fundamental requirements must be met to put an end to this cycle that threatens to continue this very day with demonstrations related to the commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of Palestinian exile in 1948: on the one hand, respect for international humanitarian law, which is fully applicable in the Gaza Strip, in particular the imperative to protect civilians; and, on the other hand, respect for human rights, in particular the right to peaceful demonstration. Any steps Israel takes to safeguard its security, which is a legitimate concern that we share, must be taken within this context. We therefore call on the Israeli authorities to demonstrate careful judgement, the utmost restraint and to avoid the disproportionate use of force. Israel is a State governed by the rule of law and must, as such, apply rules of engagement that respect international standards of law and order, in accordance with its international commitments.

We condemn indiscriminate fire against protesters, which has been systematic in recent weeks, in particular yesterday. Nothing can justify that. Lethal weapons must not be used against unarmed demonstrators who pose no serious or imminent threat. This is the message of numerous non-governmental organizations, including Israeli and Palestinian ones. They underscore the extreme seriousness of the gunshot wounds inflicted on demonstrators without any justification in terms of security and that the Gaza health system is overwhelmed and approaching breaking point.

At the same time, we call on the protesters to refrain from any acts of provocation or violence, and we warn those, principally Hamas, who would seek to hijack the demonstrations or use them to threaten Israel's security along the barrier. As members know, France will never undermine the security of Israel.

Not only in the Gaza Strip but also in the West Bank and Jerusalem, the risk of the situation deteriorating and escalating out of control is extremely high in an increasingly tense regional context, especially on the northern border of Israel. Everyone must therefore show restraint and a spirit of responsibility, in particular the Palestinian and Israeli officials in their respective statements.

It is also up to the Security Council to speak with a strong voice in order to help to prevent the ongoing escalation. That is a key point. The silence observed by the Council since the beginning of the crisis is less and less understandable. Since yesterday, it has left a dangerous void. That silence must be replaced by a clear public statement without delay. To that end, France is ready to work in a constructive spirit with its partners. The Security Council cannot be prevented from speaking on such a serious matter. Otherwise, its very calling, if not its raison d'être, are at stake.

I come to my last point. In the tense context that I have just described, our collective responsibility is to preserve the parameters that alone will in due course resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The question of Jerusalem is at the heart of such parameters because it is a precondition for peace between Israelis and Palestinians and, beyond that, regional stability. The question of Jerusalem concerns the entire international community.

Jerusalem has been the subject of several Security Council resolutions. In that context, the status of Jerusalem should be considered by the parties in their discussions with a view to a peace agreement. In line with the consensus that has prevailed for 70 years in the international community, France does not recognize any sovereignty over Jerusalem without agreement. Following the June 1967 conflict, we therefore did not recognize the annexation of East Jerusalem, which is part of the occupied territories under international law.

Similarly, in 1980, we did not recognize Israel's unilateral acts with regard to Jerusalem. The Security Council adopted resolutions 476 (1980) and 478 (1980), which provide for two principles in particular. First, any decision or action to alter the status or character of Jerusalem is considered null and void and must be rescinded. Secondly, all States Members of the United Nations that have established diplomatic missions in Jerusalem must withdraw them from the city. That is what happened as a result of resolution 478 (1980) without exception.

Jerusalem should become the capital of two States — Israel and Palestine — in line with modalities that must be defined through negotiation. No unilateral decision can replace that. France condemned the decision that was taken by the United States in December and implemented yesterday.

As we all know, there is no solution other than the two-State solution. However, there will be no two-State solution without agreement between the parties on Jerusalem, and no possible agreement on Jerusalem outside the internationally recognized parameters. Abandoning that framework will fuel tensions and violence because of the symbolic, historical and religious importance of Jerusalem to both the Palestinians and the Israelis. It would also create a space that will be rapidly filled by all kinds of extremists in the region who have an interest in the political conflict becoming a religious conflict.

France cannot allow itself to again see Jerusalem and the Palestinian territories, starting with the Gaza Strip, descend into chaos. Yesterday President Macron met the King of Jordan, the Custodian of the Holy Sites in Jerusalem, as well as President Abbas. Today he will speak to the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

In the symbolic and historical context of these commemorative days, which are essential to both the Palestinians and the Israelis, we call on everyone to exercise restraint, ensure calm and prevent any escalation. We call for a resumption of dialogue and negotiations, in which the international community should shoulder its full responsibility in order to support the parties and to ensure results.

Because it is a friend of both the Israelis and the Palestinians, France intends to continue its efforts with unwavering resolve. We call on the Council to fully play its role in that regard.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China supports Kuwait's request for today's emergency open meeting on the Middle East. I would also like to thank Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing to the Security Council.

Recently, there have been protests and demonstrations in Gaza. In that regard, Israel used force, which has caused heavy casualties among Palestinian civilians, including many women and children. We express our serious concern over that development. We condemn any violent actions against civilians and call on both Israel and Palestine, in particular the Israeli side, to exercise restraint in order to prevent further escalation of the tense situation. We convey our condolences and sincere sympathy to the victims and their families. We call for an objective and impartial investigation in order to clarify the events.

China has consistently advocated that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict be settled through peaceful negotiations. China condemns any measure that exacerbates tension and causes casualties among innocent civilians. We urge the parties concerned to stop the violence, the abusive use of force and, in particular, actions against civilians. The use of violence and force will not bring about security for anyone. We urge the parties concerned to create enabling conditions, resume contact and dialogue as soon as possible and seek to return to the right track of the political negotiations.

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is serious. That does not help regional stability. We hope that the parties concerned will earnestly implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, fully lift the blockade on Gaza as soon as possible and provide the people in Gaza with a normal and dignified space for their survival and development. We call on the international community to step up its assistance and support to the Palestinian people.

The question of Palestine is at the heart of the Middle East issue. It is fundamental to peace in the region. In that regard, the status of Jerusalem is a highly complex and sensitive issue. It represents the basis for the settlement of the Palestinian issue. Several General Assembly and Security Council resolutions include provisions pertaining to that issue. Under the current circumstances, we call on all parties to bear in mind peace and calm in the region, to exercise restraint, to avoid any words and deeds that may escalate the situation and to work together to facilitate the de-escalation of the situation. All parties should respect the historical differences, uphold fairness and justice, implement international consensus and strive for peaceful coexistence. In accordance with such principles and the relevant United Nations resolutions, the final status of Jerusalem should be settled through negotiations so as to reach a solution that accommodates the interests of all parties.

The two-State solution is the right way to resolve the question of Palestine. It is also an important guide for action. The international community should uphold the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative and resolve differences through negotiations in order to achieve a comprehensive, lasting and just solutuion to the Palestinian question as soon as possible.

China remains committed to supporting and facilitating the Middle East peace process. We have always stood in solidarity with the Palestinian people in the pursuit of their just cause to restore their legitimate national rights and supported the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent Palestinian State on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. China will continue to tirelessly strive to achieve peace in accordance with the four-point proposal put forward by Chinese President Xi Jinping and to promote the political settlement of the question of Palestine.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): My delegation is grateful to the Kuwaiti Permanent Mission for initiating this emergency briefing on the unfolding situation in Gaza. We also express our appreciation to Special Coordinator Mladenov for his comprehensive and objective update.

We were alarmed by the situation in that part of the Middle East. We are extremely concerned about the increase in the death toll caused by violence on the border between the Gaza Strip and Israel. My delegation expresses deep grief following the tragic loss of Palestinian civilians during protests. We consider that to be an irredeemable loss of life. Kazakhstan fully supports the right of the Palestinian people to self-expression and peaceful demonstrations. While tensions on the ground are high, Kazakhstan calls on all actors to show responsibility to prevent further tension and to avoid the instigation of violence. We believe it could be a dangerous development in the situation in the Middle East region as a whole. In that regard, Kazakhstan calls on both sides of the conflict to exercise restraint.

The Republic of Kazakhstan calls on the international community to take exhaustive measures to immediately end the violence. After several weeks of violence and in the face of the growing number of Palestinian victims in the Gaza Strip still today, Kazakhstan condemns the indiscriminate use of live ammunition against civilians and urges the Israeli authorities to exercise restraint. Investigations should be conducted on all of those cases. We reiterate that Israeli security forces must calibrate the use of force. We recall the common duty of United Nations States Members to protect civilians, especially minors.

We join the position of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation concerning the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. We endorse the outcomes of the Dhaka declaration

adopted at the forty-fifth session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Bangladesh on 6 May. Specifically, we reiterate that Jerusalem is the common homeland of different ethnicities and religions. All parties must avoid taking actions that might further escalate the situation, while both Palestine and Israel must respect each other's right to existence. International law is unambiguous about the status of Jerusalem. Any unilateral action to change the status of the city runs counter to the letter and spirit of international law and Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, and fuel violence and instability in the region. The status of Jerusalem will have to be determined in the framework of negotiations to come in the context of internationally agreed parameters in order to reach a just and lasting solution — namely two States, living side by side in peace and security.

Kazakhstan considers it important to continue efforts to consolidate the Palestinian ranks on the Palestine Liberation Organization political platform as a necessary condition to practically realize the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for the creation of their own independent State.

We note that the parties must find a solution for the difficult humanitarian situation of Gaza. That requires economic confidence-building measures and strong support from the international community. With regard to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Kazakhstan reiterates the need to support that important mechanism. In that regard, Kazakhstan endorses the concern expressed earlier by the Special Coordinator over the funding of UNRWA this year. A significant reduction in its regular budget has already increased the anxiety level of the 5.3 million Palestine refugees, who have already suffered the longest-protracted refugee crisis.

Lastly, while reaffirming its commitment to the decisions and resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, the Republic of Kazakhstan has consistently supported the early, complete and comprehensive settlement of the situation in the Middle East within the framework of peaceful political progress. We believe it is urgent to recreate the necessary conditions for the search for a political solution in a regional context already marked by strong tensions. We call upon the leaders of Israel and Palestine and other parties to take concrete steps to preserve the possibility of peaceful coexistence and the two-State solution, to strengthen the prospects for peace by remaining calm and exercising the maximum restraint in order to avoid actions that can erode and derail peaceful efforts and further escalate tensions between the Palestinians and Israelis. It should be based, as we always say at the Council, on the inalienable rights of Palestinians to statehood and Israel's to security. In the very near future, we must begin negotiations on each existing problem, aimed at reaching agreement on pending issues and giving them a final status. We believe that only a political solution and confidence-building measures in different dimensions can help the parties to resolve the contradictions.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing. We have been following the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory and the high number of Palestinians killed and injured in the Gaza protests. Let me join others in expressing our deepest sorrow and sympathy for the loss of lives. We wish the injured a speedy recovery.

I would like to echo what the Secretary-General said yesterday through his spokesperson:

"Israel security forces must exercise maximum restraint in the use of live fire. Hamas and the leaders of the demonstrations have a responsibility to prevent all violent actions and provocations."

We are also holding this meeting against the backdrop of ongoing discontent from Palestinians and the region over the latest development surrounding the issue of the city of Jerusalem. We have expressed our position on this issue unequivocally, which is in line with the African Union position reiterated yesterday by Chairperson Moussa Faki. We believe the Jerusalem issue is a final-status issue that must be resolved through direct negotiations between the two parties on the basis of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, while taking into account the legitimate concerns of both the Palestinian and Israeli sides.

It is self-evident that, unless the peace process is advanced and the underlying problems are resolved peacefully, the current tragedy would only happen again and again, eventually reaching the point of no return. That is where we seem to be headed. The situation is that grave. Much greater violence is becoming increasingly imminent, as a natural consequence of the current circumstances.

That is why preserving the possibility of reaching a two-State solution is absolutely critical and cannot be avoided. There is no other viable option. All arguments to the contrary are unrealistic and are not consistent with the firm commitment to seek a just and democratic resolution of the problem.

That is why it is so critical that ways and means be found to limit the damage that would be caused and to try, no matter how difficult, to continue the peace process and save the two-State formula, which is a long-held position of the United Nations and the international community. But there is no denying the fact that the formula may soon become unviable — a situation from which no one would benefit, jeopardizing the aims of achieving greater security or promoting national aspirations. The basic elements required for reliable and sustainable peace between the Palestinians and Israel are two, that is, dependable security for Israel, on the one hand, and the realization of the national aspiration of Palestinians, on the other. Any attempt to run away from this reality or to ignore it can lead only to the tension, violence and bloodletting we have been witnessing. Whether done openly and without qualms or in a less transparent manner and far from public gaze, the attempt to make the Palestinian quest for justice and fairness a footnote to other issues that the region has in abundance would no doubt lead to perpetual turmoil with unimaginable consequences for all.

The writing is on the wall, and the trajectory is by no means unfathomable. Nevertheless, it is the parties that should show flexibility to engage in direct and meaningful negotiation to reach a final settlement on all issues. However, the international community — and particularly the Security Council — should discharge its responsibility in helping and encouraging the two sides to do so.

It is also in that context that we support initiatives that have been under way to facilitate negotiation between the Israelis and the Palestinians with a view to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting resolution. The efforts of the Middle East Quartet, the Quarter's road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and the work of countries within and outside the Council are very much appreciated and should be encouraged to continue.

I want to conclude by expressing profound appreciation to Mr. Mladenov for the very honourable way he has been discharging his responsibilities. We realize how heavy that responsibility is.

Mr. Djédjé (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks Kuwait for the initiative of holding this emergency meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I congratulate Mr. Mladenov for the quality of his briefing.

Côte d'Ivoire remains particularly concerned about the serious events on the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip in the context of the March of Return. The violence, which began on 30 March, culminated yesterday, 14 May, with the transfer of the American Embassy to Jerusalem. In the face of this new outbreak of violence, which has reportedly caused the deaths of nearly a 100 Palestinians and injured nearly 8,000 since 30 March, my country calls on the parties to exercise restraint and refrain from unilateral actions that could exacerbate the situation and defer the prospects for a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis to a for a long time to come.

Côte d'Ivoire remains convinced that there is no alternative to the search for peace other than through dialogue. It therefore urges the parties to return to the negotiating table and engage in constructive dialogue on the basis of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. In that regard, my country reaffirms its principled position in favour of a negotiated settlement leading to the solution of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

As for the final status of the city of Jerusalem, Côte d'Ivoire believes that it must be negotiated within the framework of a concerted solution between the two parties, as stipulated in the relevant United Nations resolutions. My country therefore calls for the resumption, without delay, of talks between Israelis and Palestinians with a view to ending the political impasse in the peace process.

My delegation unreservedly supports the objective of comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East and reiterates its readiness to work with all Council members towards a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I join others in thanking Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his sobering briefing. We deplore the loss of lives and the number of people wounded, as he described.

As I said last month in the Security Council, we cannot afford to put the peace process on the back

burner (see S/PV.8244). The gap between the two sides is growing fast, as is illustrated by yesterday's events. Those events serve to underline that the current trajectory leads to loss of lives, confrontation and despair, and it results in growing divisions between Israelis and Palestinians.

I will focus on the three points: first, the demonstration in Gaza; secondly, the issue of Jerusalem; and, thirdly, the importance of the peace process and the role of the Security Council.

As to my first point, on the demonstrations in Gaza, we are alarmed by the new levels of violence. As Mr. Mladenov said, 59 people have been killed and more than 2,600 people have been wounded, 770 of whom were injured by live ammunition. That is the highest number of people killed in Gaza in one day since the conflict of 2014.

The numbers suggest that almost one in 40 people was hit by live ammunition and that one in 16 was wounded in that manner. That raises serious questions about the proportionality of the Israeli response. We are particularly worried by the killing of children and other minors and the high number of health-care workers hurt. That underlines again the need for restraint as well as the need for an independent, transparent and prompt investigation into all incidents that led to casualties.

We take note of the fact-finding assessment mechanism established by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) to review IDF actions and specific incidents that have taken place on the Israeli-Gaza border since 30 March.

While recognizing Israel's legitimate security concerns, we repeat our call upon that State to ensure that its responses are necessary and proportionate at all times, in line with its obligations under international law. The use of live ammunition should be a measure of last resort only, as stated in the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

We strongly urge all Palestinian parties to ensure the peaceful character of protests and not resort to violence. Calls to storm Israel or for the use of violence are unacceptable. Peaceful demonstrations should not be used as a cover for violence.

The demolition of the Palestinian side of the Kerem Abu Salem crossing only harms Palestinian interests. We call upon the de facto authorities in Gaza to ensure the safety of that crossing, which is the only crossing for the entry and exit of food and medical supplies and other goods. It should be protected. We call upon the Palestinian Authority and the de facto authorities in Gaza to repair the damage as soon as possible. We welcome Israel's decision to resume and ensure the normal functioning of the crossing today, despite the challenging environment.

These developments show that a structural solution for Gaza is needed now more than ever. At the same time, the humanitarian crisis has to be addressed. We would like to ask Mr. Mladenov to present his ideas and proposals on what can be done in that regard.

My second point concerns Jerusalem. The future status of Jerusalem is perhaps the most sensitive and complex of all final-status issues. Jerusalem is a holy city for Jews, Muslims and Christians. The ties of the Jewish people to Jerusalem are irrefutable and must not be denied. The ties of the Palestinian people to Jerusalem are irrefutable and must not be denied. This calls for wisdom; this calls for prudence.

Unilateral steps with regard to the future status of Jerusalem are not only unwise and counterproductive, they are above all in contradiction to international law. But they cannot be used as an excuse for violence. We will continue to respect the international consensus on Jerusalem, as embodied in resolution 478 (1980), among other things, including on the location of diplomatic representations, until the final status of Jerusalem is resolved through negotiations.

My third point concerns the peace process and what the Council can and should do. First, looking at the whole picture, what we need in the current situation is de-escalation. That applies to Jerusalem and Gaza and to Israeli-Palestinian relations generally. All parties should focus on defusing tensions and enabling efforts towards a better future for the region. While wisdom and courage are needed to return to negotiations for a political solution, both sides are taking steps that are incompatible with resolution 2334 (2016). Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's speech on 30 April contained unacceptable remarks about the origins of the Holocaust and Israel's legitimacy. Such rhetoric will only play into the hands of those who do not want a two-State solution. Israeli political leaders who advocate for annexing parts of the West Bank only play into the hands of those who do not want a two-State solution. We call on both sides to take steps that create

mutual trust and help to preserve the possibility of such a solution.

The current tensions should not be used as an argument against action. On the contrary, they demonstrate the urgency of more resolute action now. Realistically, only a two-State solution will enable both sides to fulfil their aspirations, put an end to the conflict and achieve the just and lasting peace that Israelis and Palestinians long for and deserve. We call on the members of the Quartet to convene to address the negative spiral. The situation in Gaza is worsening with each passing week and we therefore believe that a united reaction from the Council is urgently needed to help de-escalate the situation.

In conclusion, we are willing to engage with the other members of the Council to formulate an appropriate public expression that addresses the recent events and all the unhelpful steps taken on both sides. We are convinced that this can be done in a balanced manner, which will enable the Council to contribute to de-escalating the current situation.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to begin by expressing my condolences to the families of the Palestinians who were killed in the Gaza Strip and wishing a speedy recovery to the wounded. We mourn together with the Palestinian people.

We are grateful to Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his substantive briefing.

Moscow is deeply concerned about the escalation of tension in the occupied Palestinian territories, which reached a dangerous level against the background of the ceremony marking the beginning of the transfer of the American Embassy from Tel Aviv, which coincided with Palestinians' commemoration of their day of catastrophe or Nakba. The number of victims is seriously worrying and we share the feelings expressed by our Security Council colleagues about it.

Security Council resolutions state unambiguously that all issues related to a definitive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian situation can be resolved only through a direct dialogue between the leadership of Israel and Palestine. We believe that this also applies to Jerusalem, a city that should remain open to all representatives of the three monotheistic religions. Unilateral actions revising agreements affirmed decisions of the international community have become alarmingly frequent. It is obvious to us that they cannot contribute to achieving a just and lasting peace or, where a settlement in the Middle East is concerned, to realizing the national aspirations of the Palestinians and ensuring Israel's security. Unfortunately, those who undertake such actions are not only demonstrating that they are unwilling to see reason and stop, they are actively trying to provoke yet more States, increasing the risk of involving them in the destructive conflict in the Middle East.

We reaffirm the right to peaceful protest and firmly condemn the indiscriminate use of force against civilians. We urge the parties to refrain from steps that could make the situation worse. The current events have once again shown that in the continuing political vacuum of the past four years or so, the calls for violent solutions and the revision of previously reached agreements are reverberating with an ever-more destructive resonance. They are exacting a real price, expressed in human lives, tears, ruined lives and dashed hopes. However, that does not stop the irresponsible politicians. The result is a vicious cycle of violence that begets violence.

In these explosive circumstances, we see the urgency of mobilizing the efforts of the international community to relaunch the political process between Palestinians and Israelis on the international legal basis that we are all familiar with, including the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the principles of the Arab Peace Initiative, which should enable the establishment of a two-State formula and the creation of an independent and a sovereign Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital. For our part, we will continue to consistently work to promote an Israeli-Palestinian settlement based on a two-State format approved by the international community. Russia has proposed its services as a mediator several times and has offered to host a summit between the leaders of Palestine and Israel in order to start a direct dialogue. The offer still stands.

As recent events have shown, a vacuum in constructive international efforts is extremely dangerous. In particular, we think it is the right time to reactivate the engagement of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators, which, whatever anyone may say, remains a unique universal mediation format supported by Security Council resolutions. We welcome and support the inclusion in a Middle East

settlement of constructively minded regional players, especially Egypt.

We underscore the importance of the work being done by the United Nations and its specialized agencies in the occupied Palestinian territories and refugee camps. The support provided to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East continues to be indispensable.

To sum up, we would like to note the following. Despite some international actors' ambitious plans and grandiose projects, neither the world generally nor the Middle East in particular has become any safer in recent years. There have been many unilateral actions that have flown in the face of international law and have only worsened the trends towards destabilization. The current situation in the Palestinian territories is a clear example of the fact that the situation is going in the wrong direction. In the past few days, unfortunately, our feeling that those who are taking these steps have no intention of changing their direction has strengthened.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Poland.

At the outset, I would like to thank Special Coordinator Nikolay Mladenov for his very comprehensive but unfortunately profoundly alarming briefing.

We express our great concern about the tragic loss of human life in the Gaza Strip. During protests near the Gaza fence, a large number of people have been killed and injured, unfortunately including children. As we might face more tension in the coming days, we call on everyone to show the utmost restraint to avoid any further escalation of violence leading to the loss of life. We condemn all acts of terrorism, as well as incitement to violence, and we expect all to ensure that civilians, particularly children, are not put in any danger. We call for an independent and transparent investigation into those incidents and furthermore call for respect for international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including with regard to the protection of civilians.

Although we recognize Israel's right to protect its borders, we strongly underline that the use of force must be proportionate. In that context, let me stress that Israel must exercise maximum restraint in the use of live fire. With regard to demonstrations, we emphasize that Israel must respect the right to peaceful protests, while Hamas and those who are leading the demonstrations in Gaza must ensure that they remain peaceful, strictly non-violent and without any provocations.

We call upon all parties to strictly comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law. Given the number of casualties among civilians in the recent escalation in the Gaza Strip, it is our imperative to protect them at all levels. Therefore, we encourage all efforts to enhance the protection of civilians and respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law by the parties to the conflict.

The current situation in Gaza could have significant consequences for regional and international peace and security. The last three conflicts in Gaza over the past decade were a clear example of that. Therefore, the Security Council should contribute to de-escalation efforts, including through appropriate public expression.

While talking more broadly about the latest developments, we would like once again to reiterate our firm commitment to the two-State solution and, in that context, underline our position on Jerusalem, which remains unchanged. We strongly believe that the aspirations of both parties concerning Jerusalem must be fulfilled, and a way to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both States must be found through negotiations. The status of Jerusalem should also assume mutual recognition of historical relations and national rights of both parties to the city. We will continue to respect the international consensus on Jerusalem embodied in, inter alia, resolution 478 (1980), including the location of diplomatic representations until the final status of Jerusalem is resolved.

Let me once again underline that reaching a peace agreement will be possible only through peace talks based on international law and the principles governing peaceful relations among States. A key element in that context would also be a meaningful dialogue among the three main monotheistic religions.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I thank Poland, in its capacity as President of the Security Council, for holding this emergency meeting. We also express our gratitude for the sympathy and

condolences expressed by all members of the Security Council during the minute of silence honouring our martyrs. We thank Council members for having felt the urgent need to discuss the grave, deteriorating situation in occupied Palestinian territory, in particular in the Gaza Strip, owing to the heinous and deliberate crimes committed by Israel against unarmed Palestinian civilians. In addition, we thank the fraternal State of Kuwait for its current efforts as the only Arab member of the Security Council. We also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing.

We are meeting today at a tragic and painful moment for the Palestinian people, with great sorrow and bitterness. We convey our sincerest condolences to the families of the martyrs. May they rest in peace. We also wish a speedy recovery to all those who have been wounded as a result of the brutal Israeli attack on the Palestinian people who expressed their resistance in the besieged Gaza Strip on the first evening of the sacred month of Ramadan. We condemn in the strongest terms the odious massacre committed by Israel in the Gaza Strip. We call for an immediate halt to the military aggression against our people and for a transparent, independent and internationally led investigation.

The occupation is the main source of violence in our region. Attempts by some to deny that fact are undermined by the reality on the ground. We ask of those who maintain diverging narratives why they have often blocked any transparent, independent and internationally led investigation. We have said in the Council that we would accept the outcome of such an investigation beforehand. The Secretary-General, as well as Mr. Mladenov and 14 members of the Security Council, have agreed to such an investigation on many occasions. I reiterate that we will accept the outcome, whatever it may be, of such an investigation. The question is whether the other parties are willing to accept such an investigation themselves.

Why do some block the will of the majority of the Council? If what is happening on the ground is not clear, an internationally led investigation should be carried out for us to find out. As we said, we will preliminarily accept its outcome. Are the other parties predisposed to an independent, impartial and transparent investigation to be conducted under the auspices of the Secretary-General, so that matters do not continue in an environment of accusations and mutual suspicion? Let us conduct such an investigation.

Israel has chosen to intensify its brutal attacks against unarmed Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip. Israel has decided to target them in cold blood, in flagrant violation of international law, including international humanitarian law, human rights law and the relevant resolutions on the protection of civilians. That amounts to a war crime and a crime against humanity under the Rome Statute, which established the International Criminal Court.

We have come to the Security Council many times to ask for immediate action to stop Israeli aggression against our unarmed people, who are crushed under the odious Israeli occupation and have been suffering from forced displacement for more than seventy years.

We have sent hundreds of letters describing the current brutal Israeli occupation of our people's territory. We have sent numerous appeals asking for implementation of the provisions of international law, international humanitarian law, human rights law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. We have sounded the alarm about the crushing occupation of an entire people and the various forms of abuse and oppression to which they are subjected. We have warned the Council not to turn a blind eye to the disaster in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and the continuing deterioration in the conditions there thanks to the racist Israeli practices, which have increased and escalated with the illegitimate and provocative decision of the United States regarding Jerusalem. We have warned the Council about the ongoing impunity that Israel enjoys. We have asked for the exceptional immunity that enables Israel to act as if it were above the law to be removed. We have urged that Israel be held responsible for its actions and for justice for its innocent victims.

In the past, and specifically over the past two months, we have not ceased to beg the Council to prevent another massacre at the hands of Israel, the occupying Power. We knew that the occupied Palestinian people — our young people, men, women and elderly — would bear the burden of such a massacre, carried out deliberately and indiscriminately. What was the response to all of those calls? Can it be that the Council did not hear them or take all those warnings seriously? Can it be that just one member of the Council can prevent it from responding to its most elementary responsibility by blocking three attempts to release press statements? Those statements asked for just one thing, a transparent and impartial investigation to determine the facts on

the ground. Why is there such disregard for the lives of innocent Palestinians? How many Palestinians have to die before the Council takes action?

If a massacre happened in a Council member's country, and in the space of 24 hours 61 people, including eight children, died and more than 3,000 were injured, what would they do? Would they accept paralysis in the Security Council? Would they accept seeing it do nothing in the face of crimes committed by a cowardly occupying Power that hides in hills a kilometre from Gaza targeting it with air strikes, rockets and committing other heinous acts? The occupiers are armed and target unarmed people in Gaza. Would the members of the Council accept that on their own territory? Would they accept the Security Council remaining silent in the face of a massacre that continued for more than 24 hours?

The world has early-warning mechanisms, means to mediate and resolve conflicts, even accountability mechanisms. Despite all of that, none of it was applied in the case of Palestine. Council members can see what is happening right now on the ground. Why did all of those Palestinians have to die? Why are they not enjoying life this morning with their families? Did they deserve to die? Did those children deserve to die? Did they deserve to be taken away from their parents? The international community has passed laws and encouraged the protection of the rights of every human being. Why are Palestinians the exception? Why should we be the exception? Why do those massacres happen while the Security Council does nothing? Why are we the exception? Why is the Council paralysed? Throughout the past six weeks, while we have been targeted, the Council has been paralysed. Why are we the exception? When is the Council going to act? How long is it going to followthis double standard, especially when it comes to those who want to teach us a lesson? Why do they have a double standard when they want to control the Council? It is so terrible that we have to keep asking it again and again.

Israel has historically tried to deprive us of our humanity and our natural right to life, and to justify its crimes by using its own security as a pretext, as if the occupying Power has a right to enjoy security while it denies the same right to the people being crushed by its occupation. They have the right to security but we do not. Once again, we are the exception. They have the right to fire live ammunition at us in order to kill more than 61 unarmed people and injure more than 3,000 in 24 hours, wielding heavy weaponry. They are in trenches a kilometre away from the peaceful demonstrations and they have more weaponry than they need.

Today, yet again and with a heavy heart, our beloved Gaza Strip is burying more children and young people who had simply been peacefully demonstrating to protest the miserable living conditions unfairly imposed on them by the Israeli occupation, to reject the humiliation, oppression and servitude they are subjected to and to call for their rights, including the right to self-determination and the right of return. Israel, the occupying Power, killed 61 civilians in just 24 hours, including eight children. Israel injured more than 2,771 people, many of them severely, in that same 24 hours.

That brings the number of victims since the beginning of the Great March of Return on 30 March to 110 martyrs, including no fewer than 12,000 civilians injured, with at least 250 of them children. Many of those victims' injuries are severe because of the Israeli occupying Power's barbarous use of live ammunition. Israel deliberately uses lethal ammunition on Palestinian civilians, or the kind that delivers the greatest possible physical injury, leaving victims permanently disabled. According to reports from international organizations, many of the victims have suffered severe bone and tissue injuries. I call on the Council to invite those organizations — such as Médecins Sans Frontières, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, Human Rights Watch and B'Tselem — here to listen to them. They can tell the Council about the kind of weapons that were used, inflicting lasting, lifelong physical disabilities. Their limbs are amputated. They are crippled. Those are barbarous acts that show the Israeli army's lack of humanity where civilians are concerned. That is the real definition of terrorism. A similar situation in any other country would have caused an uproar. We will not be the exception. We are the Palestinian people.

Israel targets our children in order to inflict the cruellest of punishments on us and thereby extinguish the fire of life within us, because Israel understands that our children are invaluable. We live for our children. They represent our best future, the future that we wish for.

Civilians have the right to peacefully assemble and demonstrate. That is an enshrined right for everyone. The insinuations that Palestinians are responsible

for their own deaths because they are protesting the illegitimate occupation are provocative and racist. In other countries the participation of young people, women and families in demonstrations is proudly held up as proof of a vibrant democracy, and it is protected under the right to freedom of speech and peaceful demonstration. Half a million people demonstrated in Washington, D.C., against the use of guns in schools. Families and schools participated. That is permitted in other countries, but when Palestinians do the same thing in Gaza and occupied Palestinian territory, they are accused of using children as human shields. We reject that racist narrative, which turns us into people excluded from humanity.

We have the right to demonstrate with all of our family members against the occupation and its arrogance. We have the right to exercise our rights. Our men, our older people, our women and our children have that right. It is natural, civilized and accepted in ever country that is a member of the Council. Why is it not accepted in ours? Why are we being accused in a racist, fallacious way for simply exercising the same rights as anyone else, in spite of living under occupation and in a much more difficult situation?

Like the rest of humankind, we wish to teach our children about love of country and about collective participation in civilized human actions. Why are such accusations being directed at us? Those activities are not scorned in other countries. They do not say that civilians are being used as human shields. We categorically reject such descriptions of peaceful Palestinian demonstrations. We also reject the use of such claims to exonerate Israel, the occupying Power, of its responsibility in using live ammunition against Palestinian civilians, and of its responsibility for deliberately causing their deaths, mutilations and injuries. Those actions add to the despair of the Palestinian people and lessen their hopes for justice and peace.

Our call for international protection of the Palestinian people goes hand in hand with international humanitarian law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, which call for the protection of civilians in times of armed conflict, including the protection of children, women and humanitarian workers, especially journalists. We call for the implementation of those standards and principles in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the besieged and occupied Gaza Strip. No matter what version of events Israeli puts forward, the Gaza Strip cannot be excluded from the implementation of international standards for the protection of civilians. Ensuring international protection is now urgent, especially since Israel, the occupying Power, has violated international law. It has clearly failed to shoulder its responsibilities under international law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention, to ensure the security and prosperity of Palestinian civilians under occupation. That responsibility therefore now falls to the international community, in accordance with the Geneva Convention and with the resolutions and commitments of the Security Council itself.

The document sent by the Secretary-General a year and a half ago, during the Spanish presidency of the Council, on the various experiences and forms of international protection for civilians, should not remain simply words on paper. The Council should consider it in depth and should determine how to ensure international protection for the Palestinian people now that the occupying Power has failed to shoulder the responsibility that it bears under international law. That is why it is now the Council's responsibility to ensure international protection for the Palestinian people until the end of the intolerable occupation of our country and until Palestinian independence has been achieved.

I should also mention the illegitimate and provocative decision by the United States Administration concerning Jerusalem, which flies in the face of international consensus and violates the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016). That Administration has chosen to support Israel, which has increased and exacerbated tensions and sensitivities and led to this trail of blood. While no one is questioning the sovereign right of a State to choose the location of its Embassy, if that right runs counter to international law and Security Council resolutions, it is no longer a sovereign right. No country has the right to imperil our territory and place an Embassy in a territory under occupation. Jerusalem's status has been well known to the entire Council since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), which determined Jerusalem's special status, and of all the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016), as well as the agreements concluded between us and the occupying Power. According to those documents, the status of Jerusalem is to be determined in final status negotiations.

No one, under the pretext of sovereignty or for any other reason, has the right to act in flagrant violation of international law and Security Council resolutions. If we were talking about transferring the Embassy from Tel Aviv to Haifa or Ashdod, that would be fine, and the United States would be free do so. But transferring the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem is not up to the United States. That is an issue of international law and the international community.

The Trump Administration refuses to listen to what the world is saying. It refuses to listen to what is stated in United Nations resolutions, in particular those of the Security Council, or to what is laid down in international law and international standards. It refuses to listen. The United States is a super-Power that should be defending international law first and foremost. It is a super-Power that should be defending the resolutions of the Security Council and of the United Nations before anyone else, because of its position as a permanent member of the Council. As a super-Power, it should be the first to abide by international law, not flout it or close its eyes to the situation on the ground. The whole world can see the provocation. The United States should review its position and its flagrant violation of international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Furthermore, the United States Administration did not just ignore the specificity and sensitivity around the status of the city and its central role in peace; it also decided to transfer the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem while the Palestinian people were commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the Nakba, their day of catastrophe. It is another provocative decision by the United States Administration that completely ignores the feelings and legitimate rights of Palestinians and the political concerns and religious sentiments of Christians and Muslims all over the world. It is a provocation for millions of Palestinians, Muslims and Christians. The United States took that decision in complete disregard of everyone, including the Palestinian people.

As a super-Power, the United States should have put pressure on Israel to end its violations against the Palestinian people, compel it to respect international law and create an environment conducive to breaking the political deadlock and achieving peace, security, prosperity and dignity for everyone. Regrettably, it decided to do the opposite. It decided to bolster Israel's intransigence and impunity and protect it from international condemnation, accountability and any measure that might rectify a situation that is unfair to Palestinians and to their right to freedom and independence. The most recent decision taken with regard to Jerusalem has inspired the right-wing Israeli Government to implement its illegitimate policies and practices, including the murder of innocent civilians in broad daylight, without fear of consequences, since Israel has always enjoyed impunity. That has fuelled its aspirations to gain forcible control over Palestinian territory, including through the illegitimate and illegal annexation of East Jerusalem.

We must acknowledge that the absence of accountability and the protection of Israel from sanctions has enabled Israel to go ever further in its settlement building and racist policies towards the Palestinian people. It has a green light permitting it to commit increasingly serious crimes against innocent people, kill larger numbers of people, imprison Palestinians, confiscate greater stretches of land, destroy more houses and displace more people. That has provoked the current developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. That impunity has enabled Israel to continue its illegitimate and inhumane blockade of the Gaza Strip for more than 10 years. The blockade has witnessed three devastating wars, during which Israel has targeted infrastructure on the Gaza Strip, exacerbating the situation for approximately 2 million Palestinians. Israel has decided to impose collective punishment, which constitutes a war crime. Israel deprives Palestinians of protection. Urgent action is therefore required to rectify this very difficult humanitarian situation.

We have repeatedly called on the Council to lift the illegitimate Israeli blockade of Gaza and provide the humanitarian assistance we need to ease our people's suffering. Regrettably, that request has not been granted so far. We are making that request again today. Here we would like to recall resolution 1860 (2009) and the Council's demands on this issue. We ask that serious measures be taken to exert pressure on the occupying Power to end the blockade and open crossing points to enable the free movement of people and goods, in line with international humanitarian law. We also call for the support of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which, in spite of the financial crisis imposed on it, continues to implement its mandate and provide assistance to refugees. It also continues to play an important role in

easing the suffering of the people of the Gaza Strip and meeting their most urgent needs.

We call on the Security Council to act without delay to find an immediate solution to this sensitive issue, which threatens international peace and security. The Council must take immediate action to stop the massacre of our people, especially in Gaza. It cannot remain silent. It must demand that its resolutions be respected and it should guarantee their implementation. We call on all countries to work collectively or individually on the issue, in line with their legal commitments and in support of international law. That should include condemning the illegitimate and brutal attitude of Israel to the Palestinian people under occupation. Israeli settlements in our territories, including in East Jerusalem, should not be recognized. Any attempts by countries to support that illegal situation should be denounced. Measures should be taken to ensure accountability and justice. We must also take urgent action to save the lives of innocent civilians and prevent the situation from deteriorating in order to have a chance, however small, to achieve a just peace. That is why international protection must be provided to the Palestinian people in line with international humanitarian law.

Seventy years after the tragedy, injustice and shock of the Nakba, the Palestinian people, along with the international community and the members of the Security Council, continue to believe that international law is the way to justice, given that it is the surest path towards peace. States should translate words into action. It is time for serious and immediate action to be taken to ensure the primacy of international law, resume efforts to put an end to the Israeli occupation and achieve a just and lasting peace so that the Palestinian people can live in dignity and peace and exercise their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and freedom in an independent Palestinian State and the right of return. Our people have waited a long time. We have suffered for a long time. We can wait no longer for an end to this grave injustice. I request that the Council not dash our hopes and aspirations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): I will begin today by sharing the facts. For the past month, Israel has faced violent riots at the security fence with the Gaza Strip. They were not demonstrations or protests. They were violent riots. Rioters have thrown Molotov cocktails, planted explosive devices and rolled burning tires. They have sent flaming materials over the fence, igniting widespread fires on Israel's southern agricultural lands. They have repeatedly attempted to forcibly breach the fence and infiltrate Israeli territory, with the explicit goal of killing Israelis.

Hamas, the internationally recognized terrorist organization, has taken the people of Gaza hostage. This past Friday, a Hamas-led mob set fire to the Kerem Shalom border-crossing terminal and destroyed large parts of it. That crossing is a major entry point for outside goods to enter Gaza. The damage set gas lines and electricity infrastructure on fire and will cost millions of dollars to repair. But Hamas does not care. It values destruction over prosperity and death over peace. Israel has known that for a long time. We were reminded of it just last week, when the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) found and destroyed the ninth Hamas terror tunnel since last October. The tunnel started in Gaza, running alongside the Erez pedestrian crossing and ending just metres from a village inside Israel. Its goal was terror — killing and kidnapping Jews in the surrounding Israeli towns.

Hamas lives on death, but not just the death of Israeli civilians. As we have reported time and again, Hamas is guilty of exploiting the innocent people of Gaza as human shields. Hamas terrorists hide behind innocent young children and place them directly in the line of fire. The facts and the footage do not lie. Hamas is committing grave violations of international law. Its terrorists continue to hide behind innocent children to ensure its own survival, while its leaders incite the people of Gaza to violence. Yahya al-Sinwar, the head of Hamas in Gaza, recently said to a group of Palestinian youth:

> "We favor assassination over natural death and are always willing to sacrifice our lives".

A few days ago, a Hamas member who was captured after attempting to cross into Israel provided critical insight into Hamas's plot. I will reveal some of what we have learned.

First, Hamas is instructing its activists to cut the fence and steal Israel's security cameras in order to sabotage and topple the fence and disrupt IDF activity. Secondly, Hamas wants the riots that it is instigating to be seen in the international media as a popular uprising, not as a violent action led by its militants. And thirdly,

and most importantly, Hamas terrorists are hiding behind civilians during the riots. However, if the fence is breached, heavily armed Hamas terrorists will enter Israeli territory under cover of the mob to carry out attacks on Israeli civilians. Those are the facts.

When it comes to the mob rushing to the fence, too many in the international community never miss an opportunity to legitimize the Palestinian voice of violence. But when it comes to the safety of the Israeli public, too often the world is silent. This is one of the leadership's most cherished tactics. Their cycle of death works as follows: they incite people to violence; they place as many civilians as possible, including women and children, in the line of fire so as to maximize civilian casualties; they blame Israel; and then they come here to complain to the United Nations. That is the deadly game the Palestinians play, and they play it at the expense of innocent children.

Once again, the Palestinian leadership is using every ounce of its energy to attack us and to attempt to destroy us. One of the players in this game was sitting right across the room: the Palestinian representative, who left the Chamber, like Abbas, who came here, spoke and left; it is a routine. Mr. Mansour and his friends are guilty of placing young Palestinian children in harm's way. They are killing their own people; they are guilty of exploiting them for their disgraceful public-relations game.

We predicted this situation many months ago, because the Palestinians always employ the same strategy of manipulation. Every time the Palestinians have an opportunity to change the course of history — to partner with us on the path of peace — they always choose violence. They never fail to miss that golden opportunity to build a better future for their children and for ours.

But the Palestinian leaders are not the only participants in this scheme. Some in the international community are playing into their hands. They are falling into the trap, giving the Palestinians the attention they seek and legitimizing Palestinian lies and violence. Israel has witnessed this pattern over and over again, since our earliest days. Even in 1947, we watched the Palestinians miss their first opportunity. The United Nations had proposed the creation of both a Jewish State and an Arab State in the land of Israel. The Jews were given just a portion of our historical homeland, yet we accepted it. But the Arabs said no. The Palestinians could not bear the thought of sharing what had been our land to begin with, so they launched a war against us.

Israel ultimately won that battle, but the Palestinians continued with their lies and relentless violence, and too many in the international community let them get away with it. They falsely equated Zionism with racism. They saluted the Palestinian cause as Israelis were murdered, kidnapped and forgotten. They sided with Palestinian killers, often with no questions asked.

Fast-forward to 2005; you forgot about this. Israel disengaged from Gaza. We left completely. No Jewish communities — you call them settlements — or occupation. We took the entire Jewish community out of Gaza. We even took out the people who had been buried in Gaza. No IDF, no checkpoints, no civilians, nothing; we left. Prime Minister Sharon decided to try. We left Gaza in 2005. Gaza could have become a Palestinian success story, maybe the Singapore of the Middle East. It had the potential, but it could not reach it because Hamas took over in 2006. Instead of investing in education, infrastructure and the economy, Hamas lives and breathes death and destruction. Hamas spends all of its energy and resources terrorizing Israel and exploits the population of Gaza to meet that end.

Let me be very clear today: when the Palestinians say "days of rage", they mean "days of terrorism". When the Palestinians say "right of return", they mean "destruction of Israel". And when the Palestinians say "peaceful protest", they mean "incitement and violence".

The common denominator throughout our history has been the following: the international community, with a few brave exceptions, does nothing to stop the Palestinians from trying to terrorize Israel on the world stage. But the fact is that whoever supports the Palestinian ploy becomes a player in the cycle of death. Only by breaking this cycle of orchestrated riots, planned casualties and pleas for United Nations sympathy will justice truly be served.

Israel is marking two major milestones: we are celebrating 70 years since our people re-established our sovereignty and independence by founding the State of Israel in the land of Israel, and we are welcoming with gratitude President Trump's decision to move the United States embassy to Jerusalem, our ancient and eternal capital. This was a step towards peace, because in any peace agreement Jerusalem will be Israel's capital. Everyone who claims that the decision to move

the United States embassy is a reason or a justification for Palestinian violence should take another look at history. This is an excuse, not a reason for violence against Israel.

If this body truly seeks to uphold security, justice and truth, then it will stop right here and now, condemn this terror and reaffirm Israel's right to defend itself.

The Security Council must set the standard of behaviour. It must tell Hamas that violence is not the answer. Members must ask themselves what they would do — what each one would do — if a violent mob of tens of thousands was threatening to cross their sovereign borders to attack their people? What would they do if their people were faced with terror attacks day in and day out? The Council must not give in to the cycle of death that the Palestinians have created; it must call out lies when it sees them, condemn Hamas's violence and place itself on the side of truth and the right side of history.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.